FOREWORD

by Frank J. Williams

SOMETHING like 65,000 books have been published on the Civil War, more than one a day since it ended, while 16,000 of those books are about Abraham Lincoln himself. Between all those books, their studied narratives and storytelling, those authors and the country as a whole has a tremendous lack of consensus about what the Civil War means.[1]

The Civil War "has invited more speculation about whether it could have been avoided, or turned out differently" than any event in American history. What if Lincoln had assented to Southern succession? What if, in the winter of 1860-61, Congress and the states had adopted a constitutional amendment assuring the perpetuity of slavery? What if one army, during one of the many battles of the Civil War, had destroyed the other army completely? What if President Lincoln had vetoed the bill creating the state of West Virginia? Yet, none of these questions tell us what the war was all about.[2]

Abraham Lincoln holds our nation's mind like no other president. "He lived at the dawn of photography, and his pine cone face made a haunting picture." "He was the best writer in all American politics, and his words are even more powerful than his images." His greatest trial, the Civil War, was the nation's greatest trial, and the race problem that caused it is still with us today. Lincoln's murder, a poignant and violent climax to the Civil War, allowed future generations, including our own, to consider the "what-ifs."[3]

1 Frank J. Williams, "A LOOK AT LINCOLN: Consensus is Hard to Find," *Civil War Book Review*, Vol. 16 (Issue. 3, 2014), Article 3.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

Abraham Lincoln did great things, greater than anything done by Theodore Roosevelt or Franklin Roosevelt.[4] He freed the slaves and saved the Union, and because he saved the Union he was able to free the slaves. Beyond this, however, our extraordinary interest in him, and esteem for him, has to do with what he said and did. And much of this had to do with the Union—what it was and why it was worth saving.

He saved it by fighting and winning the war, of course. But his initial step in this was the decision to go to war—not a popular decision, and certainly not an easy one. His predecessor, the incompetent James Buchanan, believed that the states had no right to secede from the Union, but that there was nothing he could do about it if they did.[5] Thus, by the time Lincoln took office, seven Southern states had seceded, and nothing had been done about it. Led by South Carolina, they claimed to be doing only what the original colonies had done in 1776. To oppose them might bring on the war, and Buchanan had no stomach for this.[6]

After the southern states began seceding, Lincoln clearly understood "that the time had come when the only way to save the Union was to go to war." However, he was forced to consider whether he could say this and "retain the support of the people who had voted for him?" To his abolitionist supporters, "slavery was a sin, and the slaveholders sinners." Yet, William Lloyd Garrison, "was no friend of the Union." Garrison believed that the Constitution "was 'a covenant with death and an agreement with hell.'" Garrison even said, "[d]uring the Fort Sumter crisis . . . 'all Union saving efforts are simply idiotic.'"[7]

Demographic historian J. David Hacker, using a "sophisticated analysis of census records," estimated the death toll of the war at 750,000, twenty percent more than originally believed.[8] That number has gained "wide acceptance from

4 Eric Rauchway,. "Some Notes on Comparing Lincoln and FDR." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, www.chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2011/12/26/some-notes-on-comparing-lincoln-and-fdr/.

5 Jean H. Baker, "Learning From Buchanan." The New York Times, *The New York Times*, 26 Feb. 2011, opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/learning-from-buchanan/.

6 Walter Berns, "Why America Celebrates Lincoln." *American Enterprise Institute*, 17 Feb. 2009, www.aei.org/publication/why-america-celebrates-lincoln/.

7 Ibid.

8 Tony Horwitz, "150 Years of Misunderstanding the Civil War." *The Atlantic*, 2 July 2013, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/150-years-of-misunderstanding-the-civil-war/277022/.

Civil War scholars." Hacker's estimate, if accurate, would mean that "the Civil War claimed more lives than all other American wars combined, and the increase in population since 1860 means that a comparable war today would cost 7.5 million lives." Hacker's death toll "[does not] include the more than half million soldiers who were wounded and often permanently disabled by amputation, lingering disease, psychological trauma and other afflictions."[9]

President Lincoln confronted many challenges: the first conscription in America, defining war powers of the president, civil liberties in war time, martial law, plans for Reconstruction, and admission of new states including West Virginia.[10]

Lincoln was not keen on admitting West Virginia as it had "seceded" from Virginia—which was a state and Lincoln would never concede that it, and other "so called" Confederate states, had left the Union.[11] So, supporters of West Virginia created a legal fiction that what became West Virginia, was really the authentic Commonwealth of Virginia.[12]

West Virginia was created out of necessity in the midst of the Civil War, and admitted to the Union in 1863. Many maintain that the admission of West Virginia to the Union was completed on less than constitutional grounds. The North coveted the creation and admission of West Virginia to the Union, but Article IV, Section 3.1 of the Constitution required, and requires to this day, the approval of the original state legislature to create the state of the original state's boundaries.

The settlers in the counties west of the Alleghenies of the original Virginia had an uneasy relationship with the remainder of the state. The counties that make up the current West Virginia were insufficient to gain the prestige and prominence of planters and plantation slavery. Those in the western counties complained of a state government that overtaxed and underrepresented them.

These western counties shared miles of border with both Ohio and Pennsylvania. The river system that created natural borders also provided for the flow of population and commerce. The people of Virginia's western counties were

9 Ibid.

10 Thomas Mackhuin Owens, "Civil Liberties in Wartime." *National Review*, National Review, Jan. 7, 2015, www.nationalreview.com/2014/10/civil-liberties-wartime-mackubin-thomas-owens/.

11 Fred J. Martin, *Abraham Lincoln's Path to Reelection in 1864: Our Greatest Victory* 204. Author House, 2013.

12 Ibid.

more intimately connected with those Pennsylvanians and Ohioans, more so than their fellow Virginians.

And as Virginia took steps to secede from the Union, the people in the western counties opposed such secession. Virginia's January 1861 call for a state convention ignored precedent that required a popular vote to sanction such a call. That convention, from February into April, discussed the issue of secession. The new Confederacy was represented there, and its supporters packed the galleries, while also threatening delegates by hanging nooses from lampposts. Delegates from the western counties of Virginia, latter day West Virginia, voted against secession on April 4. But fifteen days later, the convention voted to secede.

Secessionists sought to impose what amounted to martial law throughout the state. However, those in the western counties clearly opposed secession and such further actions. Just hours after approval of secession, officials in Wheeling and other communities received orders from the state to seize Federal property. This led to western Virginians directly contradicting the state's authority. Over the next few weeks, Unionists sponsored public meetings at Wheeling, Parkersburg, and other Ohio River communities, as well as at Clarksburg and other interior towns. County conventions followed, leading to a loyalist state convention at Wheeling on the thirteenth of May. As other border states, both Unionist and Confederate recruiters worked to gain support for their cause, sometimes working in the same community at the same time. At a second convention on the eleventh of June, fifty-seven delegates established the Unionist "Restored Government of Virginia," which subsequently sanctioned the course of the western counties toward independence from Virginia.

Due to geography and circumstance, western Virginia was bound to be the first part of the state to suffer the full force of the coming war. Railroads crossed through West Virginia in the northern corner of the region. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad ran up the Potomac River from Harper's Ferry to Grafton, then swung north to Wheeling before entering the valley, and the Northwestern Railroad went from Parkersburg on the Ohio River to Grafton. Three east-west roads connected the region to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The Northwestern Turnpike ran along the rails from Parkersburg through Grafton before crossing into Winchester; the Parkersburg & Staunton Turnpike went southwest from Parkersburg through Beverly before continuing east into Staunton; and the James River & Kanawha Turnpike ran from Guyandotte through Charleston, then through Gauley Bridge and White

Sulphur Springs on the border. So, too, a network of roads formed a north-south route from Grafton down to Gauley Bridge, linking the three turnpikes. The war was fought primarily along these routes through the state.

In occupied Unionist communities like Wheeling and Parkersburg, Loyal Virginians were aided by troops from Ohio and elsewhere. However, the Confederate occupation of Grafton forced the Federals either to move into the interior or to accept the loss of the B & O linking Washington to the Ohio Valley. After their occupation of Grafton in late May, the Union won battles at Phillippi on June 3, 1861 and Rich Mountain on June 10, 1861 and secured the area near the railroad. As Union forces pushed south, another federal column battled up the Kanawha River, the two converging at Gauley Bridge late in the summer.

The Confederates, fearing that the Union's actions were a prelude to a Union drive across the mountains into the Shenandoah, secured the area around Sewell Mountain. There was a clash between these small forces at the top of Alleghany Mountain on December 13. However, because of the logistical problems of movement and supply, large-scale clashes were nearly impossible.

Union forces sought to hold the region with the least possible numbers, which led to several Confederate incursions that were unable to remain in the region for long. William E. Jones, John D. Imboden, and Albert Jenkins led such raids in 1861. Several small towns changed hands frequently during the war. Of these was the town of Romney, which changed hands fifty-three times throughout the war.

Although both sides were persistent in their efforts to negotiate large columns through the mountains, each failed. For example, the Union's attempt to push east into the Shenandoah Valley ended at White Sulphur Springs on August 26th-27th, 1863. Similar drives to the south against the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad ended at Droop Mountain on November 6, 1863. Through 1864, Federals made several additional raids against the railroad, and Confederates continued their incursions into the region. However, that year's Union victories in the Shenandoah Valley left the war in West Virginia to sputter into guerrilla fighting.

In the political arena, there was a similar fight over the separation of West Virginia to Virginia. However, due to low turnout, the plan backfired, leaving West Virginia with a number of counties that might well have preferred remaining in Virginia.

As internal dissenters within the United States, Virginia secessionists appealed to the ideals of self-determination implicit in the Declaration of Independence. But, West Virginia found that it too had its own internal dissenters eager to do the same against the authority of the state. Despite attempts otherwise, West Virginia's secessionist minority found themselves hostages to geography, their own ill-fated

attempt to thwart the new state, and the fortunes of war. In the end, West Virginia became a standing monument to the role of power rather than ideals in the Civil War era.

Pragmatism won the day when West Virginia was admitted to the Union as the 35th state on June 20, 1863.[13] Despite its low number of slaves, West Virginia was the last slaveholding state admitted to the Union.[14] At Lincoln's demand, the new state's constitution, ratified in 1863, provided for long-term, gradual emancipation for the children of slaves. Two years after admission, the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, abolishing slavery throughout the country.[15]

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13 Spencer Tucker and Paul G. Pierpaoli. American Civil War: a State-by-State Encyclopedia, 891. ABC-CLIO, 2015.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.